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Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6520th meeting

Thursday, 21 April 2011, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Osorio/Mr. Alzate	(Colombia)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Čolaković
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Onanga Ndiaye
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Nigeria	Mr. Amieyeofori
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I should like to invite the representatives of Australia, Bangladesh, Cuba, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 18 April 2011 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2011/259 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Thursday, 21 April 2011, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: As always, it is a pleasure and an honour to be here to report to the Security Council. I regret to report that the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations has persisted in the last month. This is of particular concern given the institutional achievements of the Palestinian Authority and the evolving regional situation. Bold and decisive steps are needed to resolve this decades-long conflict, with vision, leadership and responsibility on the part of all concerned. It is also important that any outbreaks of violence that could undermine political efforts be prevented and that the parties refrain from provocative steps on the ground.

Quartet envoys continued to work with the Israelis and the Palestinians to maximize prospects for resuming direct negotiations on a two-State solution. Regrettably, after follow-up meetings with the parties on 5 April, it was determined that more time was needed for consultations before the next Quartet meeting could be scheduled. The Quartet remains committed to convening such a meeting as soon as possible. The United Nations continues to work for a balanced and effective Quartet initiative that could help the parties to engage meaningfully in direct negotiations and give a clear international signal of the importance of finding a way forward.

Both parties should be concerned at the fact that the political track is falling behind the significant progress being made by the Palestinian Authority in its State-building agenda. In its report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) meeting in Brussels on 13 April, the United Nations made clear its assessment that in the six areas where we are most engaged with the Palestinian Authority, governmental functions are now sufficient for a viable Government of a State. The six areas include governance, rule of law and human rights; livelihoods and productive sectors; education and culture; health; social protection; and infrastructure and water. In parallel, Israeli measures to facilitate movement have

also supported economic activity and access to basic services.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund also reported strong progress in institution-building at the AHLC meeting, and the AHLC Chair concluded that the Palestinian Authority was above the threshold for a functioning State in the key sectors studied. However, we must be aware that these admirable achievements have been to date limited to certain areas of the occupied Palestinian territory and do not apply yet to East Jerusalem, much of Area C and Gaza.

The reporting period saw the highest levels of violence in Gaza and Israel since Operation Cast Lead more than two years ago. Violence was ongoing at the time of the last briefing, on 22 March. That same day, four members of a Palestinian family, including three children, were killed by an Israeli strike in Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed regret at the unintentional killing of civilians, while stating that Israel was responding to the firing of rockets at Israeli civilians from populated civilian areas in Gaza. The next day, on 23 March, an Israeli civilian was injured in Be'er Sheva by a Grad rocket fired from Gaza.

Efforts to de-escalate the violence led to a brief lull. However, on 2 April, an Israeli airstrike killed three leaders of the Hamas military wing who were allegedly involved in plans to kidnap Israeli citizens in the Sinai during Passover. The Hamas military wing used a guided anti-tank missile to hit a school bus on 7 April, injuring two people, one of whom, a teenager, died last week. Between 7 and 10 April, Israel launched heavy military operations in Gaza. Rockets continued to be fired into Israel, a number of them reportedly intercepted by Israel's new Iron Dome anti-missile defence system. Following further efforts to de-escalate the violence, a new, uneasy calm was restored on 10 April. It has been largely respected since, notwithstanding the firing of two Grad rockets towards Ashdod on 15 April. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Egyptian authorities were actively engaged in efforts to de-escalate the violence.

Overall, Palestinian militant groups, including Hamas, have fired 111 mortar shells and 155 rockets, while Israel has conducted six incursions and 57 air strikes into Gaza since the last briefing to the Security Council. One Israeli child, referred to earlier in the context of the bus incident, was killed, and two civilians were injured by Palestinian rocket fire. Nineteen Palestinian militants and 15 civilians were killed, while 17 militants and 60 civilians were injured in Israeli military actions.

We are alarmed at the actions of Hamas to escalate violence, endangering civilians on both sides and risking a deeper confrontation with Israel. We are also deeply concerned at civilian casualties on both sides. The Secretary-General strongly condemns the firing of rockets from Gaza and calls for it to end. He also reiterates his calls for maximum restraint by Israel. All parties must fully respect international humanitarian law. In the interests of the civilian populations on both sides, we call on the parties to uphold and solidify the prevailing fragile calm.

Citing security concerns, Israel closed the Kerem Shalom crossing point to Gaza from 5 to 12 April. This illustrates the detrimental effect of the violence on the humanitarian situation and the importance of implementing Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) in all its aspects. The weekly average of truckloads entering the Strip during the reporting period was 909, compared with 566 in June 2010 before the announcement of the revised Israeli policy, but still far below pre-closure levels.

During the reporting period, Israel approved six additional United Nations school and road projects in Gaza. However, we urge Israel to give early approval to two United Nations housing projects in Rafah and Khan Yunis comprising 1,100 units. We also hope that coordination procedures to facilitate the entry of approved material will be further streamlined. Greater liberalization of the import of construction materials into Gaza, including aggregate, iron bar and cement, is essential for recovery, as is an increase in exports.

I emphasize the importance of the Government of Israel making more sustained and far-reaching progress towards ending the closure of Gaza, within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). It is essential for the operation of legitimate crossings to be adequate to meeting the needs of Gaza's civilian population.

In the context of media reports of potential flotillas, let me state our belief that the appropriate way to meet needs in Gaza is through legitimate crossings. In this regard, I wish to recall the position of the

Quartet, as expressed in its 21 June 2010 statement, that those wishing to deliver goods to Gaza should do so through established channels so that their cargoes can be inspected and transferred via land crossings into Gaza. The Quartet emphasized that there is no need for unnecessary confrontations and called on all parties to act responsibly in meeting the needs of the people of Gaza. The AHLC also called on all international supporters to make use of existing land crossings to channel their support to Gaza and to abstain from provocations.

We deplore the abduction and murder of Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian citizen and activist, in Gaza on 15 April, allegedly by a Salafist group. A number of suspects have reportedly clashed with and been arrested by the de facto authorities in Gaza.

I regret to report no progress in efforts to secure the release of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, who has been in Hamas captivity since 25 June 2006. We continue to call for his release and for immediate humanitarian access to him. We also continue to follow closely the situation of several thousand Palestinians in Israeli prisons, whose human rights must be respected. We continue to underscore the importance of releases of prisoners to the Palestinian Authority.

We also remain concerned that the Palestinian Authority is not able to extend its State-building work to Gaza due to the ongoing Palestinian political divide. This only underscores the need for progress towards Palestinian unity within the framework of the Palestinian Authority and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. In this regard, I note that consultations on the Palestinian reconciliation continue, although they have not led to the formation of a unity Government, as President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad had hoped they would.

In the meantime, preparations for municipal elections on 9 July continue in the West Bank. Hamas has yet to authorize electoral work in Gaza. The Palestinian Central Election Commission opened voter lists for exhibition and challenges between 9 and 14 April in the West Bank, including for the approximately 40,000 newly registered voters.

We are very concerned at ongoing Israeli settlement activity and demolition of Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On 4 April, the Government of Israel retroactively authorized construction work and plans for further expansion in the West Bank settlements. We remain very concerned at plans for more than 2,200 settlement units in East Jerusalem, although we note that their further consideration has been postponed until May. More permanent measures to curtail and halt settlement expansion are needed. Settlement activity is contrary to international law and Israel's commitments under the Road Map, and detrimentally affects Palestinian readiness to return to direct negotiations. We call on Israel to respect international humanitarian law.

Palestinian security forces continued to work to maintain law and order in the West Bank. Investigation is ongoing into the murder on 4 April of the actor and director Juliano MerKhamis, who will be remembered as a symbol of coexistence and peace.

Following the Itamar murder on 11 March, two suspects from the neighbouring Palestinian village of Awarta were recently arrested for allegedly perpetrating the killing, and a number of others were arrested as alleged accomplices. During the investigations, the 6,500 inhabitants of Awarta were placed under several curfews. Over 400 men and 80 women were reportedly interrogated, and many homes were searched.

Since last month's briefing to this Council, Israeli security forces conducted 321 search operations in the West Bank, during which 38 Palestinians were injured and 228 arrested. Ten Palestinians were injured by Israeli settlers during the reporting period. Demonstrations continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, resulting in 19 Palestinian injuries and a number of arrests.

We welcome the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) decision of 6 April to systematically investigate all Palestinian casualties in the West Bank caused by IDF fire among individuals not engaged in hostilities. We look forward to the effective implementation of this important measure of accountability.

Turning to the subject of Lebanon, almost three months after his nomination as Prime Minister-designate by President Sleiman, consultations by Najib Mikati have not yet led to the formation of a new Government. Mr. Mikati and the President have decided to give additional time to the process in order to ensure that the composition of the next Government

will be as desired by all Lebanese and in accordance with the Constitution.

Against this background, there have been some security incidents in Lebanon. On 27 March, a small bomb exploded in a church in the eastern city of Zahleh, causing damage but no causalities. No party claimed responsibility for the attack, which came four days after seven Estonian nationals were kidnapped while cycling on a road near Zahleh, in an area close to the border with Syria. Despite several arrests, the motives of the kidnappers and the fate of the cyclists are not known.

In Nahr el-Bared camp, the first delivery of homes in the reconstructed camp took place on 19 April. This was a significant milestone, giving hope to the community displaced since the destruction of their camp in 2007. I call upon donors to also contribute towards the full reconstruction Nahr el-Bared.

The overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has remained generally quiet and stable. Israeli air violations continued on an almost daily basis.

The international community is rightly concerned over the protracted stalemate in the peace process. We stress the importance of supporting and empowering the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad and of bringing the parties back to the table. Despite the Palestinian Authority's accomplishments, the institutional achievements of the State-building agenda are approaching their limits within the political and physical space currently available. Far-reaching rather than incremental steps should be taken by Israel to lead to progress on the ground and to roll back measures of occupation to match the Palestinian Authority's achievements.

At the same time, the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations on all final status issues is urgent. We believe that the international community must play its part in helping the parties to move forward, and we will continue to engage Quartet partners, hoping that the conditions will be met for the holding of a principals' meeting as soon as possible.

The United Nations will continue to work for a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the Security Council's resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Road Map and the agreements previously reached between the parties.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

Before I give the floor to delegations wishing to make statements, I remind all speakers that their statements should be reasonably brief in the light of the 43 requests for the floor today.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, I express warm congratulations to your country, Colombia, on its presidency and skilled guidance of the Security Council this month. We also express appreciation to the People's Republic of China for its wise stewardship of the Council last month.

I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynne Pascoe for his briefing, and renew our appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his efforts to uphold the Charter and the principles of United Nations resolutions aimed at realizing a peaceful, just solution to the question of Palestine.

We come before the Security Council at a most historic time in our region, and for our world. The dramatic developments taking place in the Middle East are altering the geopolitical landscape and bringing to the fore the universal aspirations of all peoples for freedom, social and economic justice, democracy and respect for human rights. Those are goals for which the Palestinian people have struggled for decades in their quest to realize their legitimate national aspirations, foremost among them the aspiration to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in their homeland of Palestine. Tragically, the Palestinian wish to live as an independent, free and dignified people in peace and security with all their neighbours — developing, prospering and responsibly contributing as full members of the region and the community of nations — continues to be denied and obstructed.

In the twenty-first century — in spite of the calls by all peace-loving nations and champions of human rights for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab lands; the realization of an independent State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders; and a just solution to the plight of Palestine refugees — finding the political will to confront this injustice

remains elusive. Israel's military occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues in defiance of all legal, moral and political norms and principles. It is an injustice being systematically perpetrated in full view of the international community, under distorted and illogical pretexts intended to justify the unjustifiable, namely, the subjugation of an entire nation of people.

Regrettably, the appeals to the Security Council to resolve this prolonged conflict, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, by applying to Israel the same legal and moral yardstick applied to all other issues on the global agenda remain unheeded. Consequently, the occupying Power has continued to breach the law, belittling and violating the resolutions of international legitimacy adopted by the Council and other United Nations organs, and to defy the international community with total impunity.

The result has been continued conflict, loss of life and turmoil — to the detriment of Palestinians and Israelis, regional and global peace and security, the rule of law, particularly humanitarian and human rights law and the collective and individual obligations derived therefrom, and the credibility of the international system. The Palestinian people thus remain under occupation, prisoners in their own homeland, besieged and blockaded in the Gaza Strip and confined and abused between settlements, walls and a matrix of hundreds of military checkpoints and Israeli-only roads in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, subject to the mercy of the occupying Power and its destructive acts of aggression, colonization and repression.

This is the present-day reality of the Palestinian people. This is in spite of the fact that their right to self-determination has been reaffirmed annually by the General Assembly and recognized by the International Court of Justice as a right erga omnes; in spite of the reaffirmations of their right to independence and statehood; and in spite of serious efforts by the Palestinian leadership and all concerned regional and international parties aimed at the realization of that right and a just peace settlement based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

We therefore return to the Security Council with an appeal that it uphold its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security vis-à-vis the question of Palestine. The Council's resolutions remain valid, and we call for all necessary efforts for the implementation of those resolutions. The Council cannot surrender in the face of continued Israeli defiance. It must be unwavering in its calls for respect for the law and its own resolutions and act with conviction to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its obstruction of peace and stability in our region.

In a series of letters sent to the President of the Council in the period since the last open debate in January (see S/PV.6470), we have conveyed in detail the gravity of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel's intransigence and the lack of political will to confront it have kept the political process frozen and allowed for the continuation of Israeli violations that have further destabilized the situation on the ground.

While the international community decries the killing of civilians, invoking the responsibility to protect and acting to protect civilians in armed conflict, in the Gaza Strip we witness once again a resurgence of the cycle of violence and an escalation of Israeli military attacks, killing and wounding more Palestinian civilians. The deliberate isolation and deprivation of the civilians in Gaza also continues as a result of the Israeli blockade, which is a massive form of collective punishment that amounts to a war crime and a crime against humanity.

We reiterate our call for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, as well as for the immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade. The easing of restrictions is insufficient. An end to the blockade must mean the freedom of movement of persons and goods into and out of Gaza; the reconstruction of homes, infrastructure and the facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; commercial flows for the rehabilitation of industry and the economy; and the restoration of the link between the West Bank and Gaza. All of this is essential for the revival of hope among our people. Resolution 1860 (2009) must be fully implemented. The Fourth Geneva Convention must be respected. And the occupying Power must be held accountable for its breaches.

In that regard, we reiterate our call for accountability for all the crimes perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian civilian population, including in

particular in connection with its destructive and deadly military aggression against the Gaza Strip during December 2008. We will continue our efforts to follow-up on the findings and recommendations of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict — the so-called Goldstone report (A/HRC/112/48) — to ensure that justice is served.

Today, I must also reaffirm the strong condemnation by the Palestinian people and their leadership of the killing of Italian peace activist Vittorio Arrigoni by extremists in Gaza. We convey our deepest condolences and sorrow to the victim's family on their tragic loss. We reaffirm that this brutal act in no way reflects the values and sentiments of the Palestinian people, who are so deeply grateful for the support and solidarity they receive from all over the world for their just cause.

As detailed in our letters, Israel has also persisted with its illegal settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in a most flagrant manner. Despite the veto regrettably cast on 18 February (see S/PV.6484), we believe that the international community sent a clear message to the Israeli Government that it rejects this illegal practice and demands the complete cessation of all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. Yet, Israel chooses to ignore that message, acting contrary to the law and sabotaging the two-State solution, in spite the international consensus and Israel's alleged commitment to it.

Rather than rolling back and moving to ultimately end the occupation, Israel continues to illegally confiscate Palestinian land, expand settlements unit by unit, build the wall, demolish homes and strip Palestinians of their residency rights — practices that are most intense in and around occupied East Jerusalem — in an attempt to alter the territory's demographic composition and physical contiguity in its favour. The settlers, whose terrorism is increasing and who constitute the core of the illegal colonizing force, also continue to rampage against the indigenous Palestinian population. Palestinian civilians peacefully protesting that rabid Israeli colonization of their land continue to be beaten, injured, killed, detained, jailed and vilified, along with the Israeli and international activists joining them in protests. These demonstrators deserve the same protection as all other civilians peacefully protesting abuse of their rights.

In recent weeks, Israel has also escalated military raids in Palestinian towns and villages, and continues to arbitrarily detain and imprison Palestinian civilians. Most disturbingly, nearly the entire village of Awarta has been detained in connection with the killing of a settler family. This has included the violent forced entry of homes, round-ups of civilians in the dead of night, and the detention of more than 100 women, including the elderly and infirm, who were forced into a camp for interrogation and DNA testing by the occupying forces. This incident underscores yet again the sheer lack of respect for human rights and due process of law by Israel, which continues to imprison thousands of Palestinian civilians, and its total reliance on force, intimidation, humiliation and collective punishment vis-à-vis the Palestinian people under its occupation.

We are at a critical crossroads and believe that no further proof is needed to confirm that the situation will worsen drastically if action is not taken to stem the deterioration and revive the path to peace. What more must we wait for — another Israeli attack against Gaza that will bring more bloodshed, destruction and suffering of innocents, or the further acceleration of the colonization of the West Bank that will result in the collapse of the two-State solution? We cannot allow this to happen. The time for decisive action is now, and we believe that the international community is in full agreement on the matter.

Seizing the small window of opportunity before us will require taking immediate steps to address this volatile crisis and resume a credible peace process on the basis of the internationally supported parameters for a solution. We regret the loss of momentum, including as a result of the repeated postponement of Quartet meetings and a lack of action consistent with the Quartet's target date of September 2011 for the conclusion of a peace settlement, as well as of a lack of unanimity that has to date prevented the arrangement of the long-overdue Security Council mission to the Middle East region proposed by the Russian Federation. The political will must be found to act collectively on the basis of the relevant resolutions and the well-known terms of reference of the peace process. In this regard, we stress the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the need to seize the opportunity for peace, security and normalization that this bold initiative presents.

We reiterate our call on the Security Council to uphold its obligations and take the necessary measures to bring an end to Israel's violations against the Palestinian people. We also renew our appeals to all the Quartet members, in the light of the clear commitments they have undertaken in this regard, and call for bold leadership, including on the part of the United States, bearing in mind the role it has assumed in the peace process. A clear endorsement of the parameters of the solution, as reflected in the statement articulated in the Council on 18 February by the United Kingdom, France and Germany and supported by the rest of the European Union and countless other countries, is long overdue and would make a serious contribution to a revival of the political process on a credible basis.

Israeli defiance must no longer be rewarded or tolerated. Israel must be called on to demonstrate its commitment to peace with actions, not just empty words. It must be called on to cease its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and uphold its obligations under international law, as well as the Road Map obligation of a settlement freeze. It must be called upon to cease all actions aimed at fragmenting and altering the Palestinian-Arab character and identity of the territory in order to advance its unlawful annexation. Israel must also be called on to respect the sensitivity and sanctity of Christian and Muslim holy sites, with an immediate appeal not to obstruct the celebrations of Christian pilgrims, including Palestinians, this Easter in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Only respect for the law and responsible actions, including ending incitement and provocation, can build trust and demonstrate to the Palestinian people whether or not Israel is a credible peace partner. This is imperative to reviving negotiations on all final status issues in order to achieve a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will bring an end to the Israeli occupation and realize the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and a just, agreed solution for the Palestine refugee question based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Despite recent serious disappointments, the Palestinian people have not lost hope, and their leadership remains committed to achieving by political means a just peace settlement that will ensure the resolution of all final status issues. We continue to exert every effort in this regard, working proactively and constructively to alleviate the suffering of our people and to promote the ultimate fulfilment of their legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination and freedom — an inalienable right that is non-negotiable.

This has recently included renewed efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation and unity. Fully recognizing the damage inflicted on our just cause by internal division, President Mahmoud Abbas has announced an initiative to go to Gaza as soon as possible with the aim of ending the division and a dark chapter in our history, and of restoring the unity of our people and land. We believe that this is imperative in order to heal and strengthen our people as they continue on the journey towards realizing their noble national goals, and we call on all concerned parties to support this effort.

The leadership also continues to work non-stop to implement the State-building plan launched nearly two years ago by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. This plan is rapidly advancing to completion by August 2011, with the only obstacle to the full realization of its objectives being the ongoing Israeli occupation. We welcome the endorsements of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians regarding Palestinian readiness for independence. We reiterate our gratitude for the strong international support of this important initiative, which is an integral part of our national efforts to achieve independence. In that connection, we also reiterate our gratitude to all Member States that have extended recognition to Palestine on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the international consensus on the two-State solution. We urge countries that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so at the earliest possible time in order to contribute to making our independence a reality soon.

I reaffirm our determination to achieve an end to the Israeli occupation begun in 1967, and the independence this year of the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, by the target date of September 2011 set by the Quartet, announced by United States President Obama, and endorsed by the General Assembly. We remain committed to the path of peace and call on the Security Council and the entire international community to

redouble their efforts at this critical time to uphold the principles for which the United Nations stands in order to bring an end to this conflict, enable Palestine to take its rightful place among the community of nations with pride and dignity, and allow peace and security to flourish in our region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Reuben (Israel) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, first of all, to thank you, Mr. President, and the Colombian delegation for your efforts in carrying out the work of the Security Council during this month.

(*spoke in English*)

Today's debate occurs in the midst of historic changes in the Middle East. With these changes, which hold the promise of spreading new freedom and prosperity in our region, we also see many challenges. Extremists and terrorists continue to pursue the same destructive agendas, seeking to take advantage of the turbulence created by the transformations that are now occurring.

Recent events in the Gaza Strip provide another clear example of the destabilizing threat posed by these terrorists and their patrons, bringing to light once again, the depth of their callousness in carrying out violent attacks that deliberately target innocent civilians — men, women and children.

Since the beginning of March, Hamas and other terrorist groups have launched some 92 rockets and 141 mortars at civilians throughout southern Israel, as part of what is the most serious escalation of projectile fire emanating from Gaza in more than two years. There is no question about the intended targets of these attacks. They have launched rocket after rocket at major Israeli population centres that are home to hundreds of thousands of people. They have struck houses and buses, factories and farms, synagogues and schools.

Just two weeks ago, on 7 April, Hamas members used an anti-tank missile that they had smuggled into the Gaza Strip to strike and completely destroy a school bus travelling in southern Israel. This act of terrorism injured the bus driver and fatally wounded 16-year-old Daniel Aryeh Wildfich, who passed away this week from injuries he sustained in that attack.

As residents of New York, we all see the yellow school buses that bring local children to school. Some in the Hall entrust those buses to safely transport their own children. I ask my colleagues sitting around the table, Can you imagine how you would feel if an anti-tank missile was deliberately fired at such a bus in Manhattan or Brooklyn? This is the reality facing many Israelis today. This is also the reality facing the Israeli Government as it seeks to pursue the terrorists that carry out these horrific attacks — terrorists who consistently demonstrate their disregard for any considerations of human life and basic precepts of international law.

I am continually astonished that some in the international community express the belief that the de facto terrorist organization now in control of Gaza can conduct an independent, credible and impartial investigation into the crimes that it commits on a daily basis. It is naive, at best, to put such faith in that terrorist group, which time and again shows only disdain for the universal human values on which such an investigation would be based.

The use of an anti-tank missile to attack an Israeli school bus reminds us of the dangerous consequences of the continued smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip. Iran and Syria remain the primary sponsors of this illegal activity, which is carried out by both land and sea.

On March 15, Israel made the international community aware of one recent attempt by Iran and Syria to smuggle weapons into Gaza when three containers carrying some 40 tons of weaponry — including C-704 advanced anti-ship missiles — were captured on-board the *MV Victoria* cargo vessel. These containers of weapons were concealed among a cargo of lentils and cotton, providing yet another example of Iran and Syria's cynical and dangerous practice of using civilian ships and airplanes to transfer weapons to their proxies in our region. This incident reveals only the tip of the iceberg of Iran and Syria's illegal smuggling activities.

Unfortunately, the Security Council and the international community do not pay appropriate attention to the illegal smuggling of arms into Gaza — a critical aspect of resolution 1860 (2009). In spite of the frequent discussions held in the Security Council about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, there has never been a serious debate in this forum

about the clear threat that arms smuggling into Gaza poses to the security of Israel and to the stability of our region. Every day, more Israelis are placed within the range of terrorist rockets as a result of illegal arms smuggling into Gaza. The alarming potential for using these smuggled weapons to attack civilian targets in our country continues to be demonstrated over and over again. This month, terrorists in Gaza struck a school bus. Next month, it may be a ship or a civilian airliner. Israel calls on the Security Council and the international community to devote much more attention to the issue of arms smuggling to the Gaza Strip and to take tangible measures to halt this illegal activity.

On the subject of the Gaza Strip, allow me also to draw the Council's attention to plans for a provocative action that holds the potential to escalate conflict and create instability in our already very fragile region. A number of non-governmental organizations and other groups have made public their intention to direct a large flotilla of some 15 ships and more than 1,000 individuals to challenge Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. This action, which seems to be planned for the second half of May, has been organized by groups and individuals that hold many ties to Hamas and other terrorist organizations. Numerous participants engaged in the planning of this flotilla have made very troubling statements expressing their willingness to become martyrs in this effort.

As is widely known, there are established mechanisms through which humanitarian assistance can be delivered to the Gaza Strip through Israel. These channels are being used daily by United Nations agencies and other international actors. My country remains ready to receive such goods in the Port of Ashdod and to transfer them to the Gaza Strip after security inspection.

Many international leaders, including representatives of the United Nations, have spoken out clearly against such flotillas and about the need for humanitarian supplies to be transferred to the Gaza Strip only through established channels. For example, in his briefing before the Council today and last July (see S/PV.6363), Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe said that such convoys were not helpful in resolving the basic economic problems in Gaza and needlessly carried the potential for escalation.

Many statements issued at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels last week offered the same perspective, including the Chair's summary, which called on all international supporters to make use of the existing land crossings to channel their support to Gaza, and abstain from provocations.

The flotilla anticipated for May is clearly designed to serve purely as a political provocation, and not to advance any humanitarian goal. Let me stress that Israel is not interested in confrontation. However, we are firmly determined to enforce our naval blockade on Gaza, which is solely intended to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition to the Gaza Strip and to stop additional terrorists from infiltrating the area.

Israel calls on the United Nations and all members of the international community to speak with a clear and resolute voice against this new provocation and to take all necessary measures to prevent it from occurring.

Israel continues to implement significant measures to improve life for Palestinians on the ground. In the West Bank, my Government is working closely with the Palestinian Authority to promote economic growth and institution-building. Since the beginning of 2010, Israel has removed more than two thirds of the roadblocks in the West Bank and expanded its professional dialogue with the Palestinian Authority in a variety of areas. These and other measures helped to grow the West Bank economy by approximately 8 per cent over the course of 2010, prompting a consistent rise in the area's standard of living.

In spite of the fact that Palestinian terrorists continue to launch attacks against Israeli towns from the Gaza Strip, Israel has taken significant steps to improve life for the area's residents. For instance, Israel has put in place new arrangements and mechanisms to usher in a substantial increase in the quantities and variety of products available for import and export, which have helped grow the Gaza Strip economy by approximately 15 per cent over the course of 2010.

An average of 159 truckloads of supplies were delivered to Gaza daily during the second half of 2010, which was nearly double the number of truckloads that were delivered during the first half of the year. Israel has also established a new joint coordination and supervision mechanism to move forward international

humanitarian projects in the Gaza Strip overseen by third parties, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Development Programme. As of the beginning of March, Israel had approved 121 such projects in Gaza, in a wide range of fields, such as education and water and sewage infrastructure. We have facilitated the transfer of more than 55,000 tons of building materials for use in those projects since the beginning of 2010.

As I have done in the Council before, I reiterate Israel's call to the Palestinians to rejoin us in direct negotiations without delay; for it is clear that peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations. It cannot be imposed from the outside. Any lasting peace agreement must be built on the core principles of mutual recognition and security. As Israel's President Shimon Peres made clear to United Nations Ambassadors during his visit to New York this month, we need solutions, not resolutions.

I urge all members of the Council to consider that in just the past two months Israelis have witnessed hundreds of projectiles fired at our communities from Gaza, the brutal murder of five members of the Fogel family in Itamar and the explosion of a bomb at a bus stop in the centre of Jerusalem, which killed a woman from the United Kingdom and injured some 50 other people. Those are just a few examples of the complex security challenges that Israel continues to face on a daily basis, which must be addressed in any future peace agreement.

Security, however, is not the only obstacle to peace. Enjoying lasting peace will also require that we build a culture of mutual understanding and tolerance, based on clear recognition of both peoples' right to exist. Israel's commitment to recognizing a future Palestinian State must be met with an equal acknowledgement that Israel is the Jewish State for the Jewish people. The Palestinian leadership must be unambiguous in its recognition of my nation's right to exist and take real steps to prepare its population to live side by side with Israelis. They must also show their commitment to peace by accepting responsibilities and not just demanding rights, meeting directly with Israeli leaders, who are just minutes away, to get down to the real work of negotiating two States for two peoples.

This week the Jewish people are observing the holiday of Passover, during which we remember our deliverance from slavery thousands of years ago and reaffirm our commitment to the importance of freedom for all people. However, this year, as we cherish our own freedom, Israelis continue to hope and pray for the freedom of our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit. Israel remains deeply concerned about Gilad's continued captivity and the fact that he has been deprived of his most basic human rights, including any visit from the Red Cross, for nearly five years. The international community must do all in its power — and more than has been done thus far — to bring about his swift release.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing today.

The United States remains deeply committed to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, agreed to by the parties. As President Obama said after his recent meeting with Israeli President Peres,

> "With the winds of change blowing through the Arab world, it is more urgent than ever that we try to seize the opportunity to create a peaceful solution between the Palestinians and the Israelis".

We continue to consult with the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as to work with the Quartet and our partners in the region, towards our shared goal of a two-State solution. Negotiations between the parties remain the only path to a solution that resolves all issues and establishes a sovereign State of Palestine alongside a secure State of Israel as a key part of a comprehensive peace among Israel and all of its neighbours.

In that regard, let me say a word about settlements. Like every United States Administration for decades, we do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. We have long urged both parties to avoid actions, including in Jerusalem, that could undermine trust or prejudge negotiations. The fate of existing settlements must be dealt with by the parties along with the other permanent status issues.

We will continue to work with the Palestinian people as they lay the foundations for a future Palestinian State. At the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians held in Brussels on 13 April, the United States welcomed the progress the Palestinian Authority has made on the crucial task of building public institutions and capacities and improving conditions for economic growth. We also underscore the importance of moving forward on the other track — political negotiations that will result in a future Palestinian State. Palestinians deserve the dignity and justice of a State of their own and the freedom to chart their own destiny, and Israelis deserve to live in security, at peace with their neighbours and confident in their future.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms recent attacks on innocent civilians. We are deeply concerned by the escalation of rocket and mortar fire from Gaza into southern Israel. We are particularly disturbed by reports indicating the increased use of advanced weaponry, including rockets, in attacks against Israeli civilians. After enduring dozens of rocket attacks on civilian targets in southern Israel, including the deeply disturbing use of an advanced anti-tank missile in a fatal attack on a yellow school bus, Israel responded by exercising its inalienable right to self-defence.

We must work together to stop Hamas and other violent extremists from launching terrorist attacks and bringing increased misery to the people of Gaza. Let there be no doubt: there is no justification for targeting innocent civilians, and those responsible for these terrorist acts must be held accountable. We also call again on Hamas to immediately release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, abducted and held by Hamas since 2006.

The United States remains concerned about conditions in Gaza. We note that the humanitarian situation has improved over the past year, including increases in the range and scope of goods and materials moving in, an increase in international reconstruction activity and a gradual expansion of exports. We will continue to work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and others to do more to ensure that the needs of the people of Gaza are being met. That includes increasing the flow of commercial goods and construction supplies while taking appropriate measures to ensure that they do not fall into the wrong hands.

We strongly condemn Iran's recent attempts to export advanced weapons and munitions in violation of several resolutions, including resolution 1947 (2010). The interception of Iranian weapons in Turkey, along the Egyptian-Sudanese border and aboard the *MV Victoria*, which was carrying sophisticated anti-ship cruise missiles and other munitions, all clearly demonstrate that Iran is trying to flout the Council's will, dramatically increasing the risks of conflict and instability in the region. We urge all Member States to make clear to Iran the consequences for regional security of its reckless behaviour. All countries have obligations under Security Council resolutions to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition.

We are also deeply concerned about reports that groups are organizing another flotilla that will attempt to sail to Gaza, ostensibly to deliver humanitarian assistance. The recent seizures of advanced weaponry underscore that Israel has clear security interests regarding cargo bound for Gaza. There are existing mechanisms to deliver goods to Gaza and there is no justification for attempts to sail directly to Gaza. We therefore strongly urge all those who wish to deliver goods and assistance to Gaza to do so through existing mechanisms and avoid any provocative actions. That will ensure that the Palestinians' humanitarian needs are addressed and that Israel's legitimate security needs are met. We also urge all Member States to reinforce this message with their nationals and organizations, and to use every legal means at their disposal to discourage additional flotillas to Gaza.

As colleagues know, the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48) is back in the news. We have long said that the issues that it raised should be resolved through credible domestic investigations and follow-up. Israel has the democratic institutions and the ability to carry out serious investigations and is doing so. Justice Goldstone recently concluded that Israel had undertaken an appropriate review process and made changes in its combat doctrine.

As we made clear when the Goldstone report was first presented, we did not see evidence that the Israeli Government had intentionally targeted civilians. Justice Goldstone has now reached the same conclusion. He also concluded that Hamas had "done nothing" to investigate the allegations of its war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. The United States urges the United Nations to end once and for all its actions in relation to the Goldstone report.

Let me now turn to Lebanon. We continue to urge that Lebanon's constitutional process be followed as it forms its next Government. We encourage all parties to avoid threats or other actions that could cause instability in Lebanon and the region. The Council and the international community as a whole must remain firm in their support for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, resolute in their commitment to all Security Council resolutions related to Lebanon, and vigilant to threats to international peace and security.

We likewise continue to support the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and we reiterate our call on all parties to refrain from any interference or attempts to influence its work. The United States is pleased that, during the 14 April incident along the Blue Line, both parties demonstrated restraint, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) immediately dispatched patrols to defuse tensions and prevent escalation. We continue to urge both parties to cooperate with UNIFIL in swiftly marking the entire Blue Line to help prevent such incidents. The parties must respect the Blue Line in its entirety.

We are deeply concerned by continuing violence and arrests in Syria, where the Government's brutal crackdown on political protests has already resulted in more than 200 deaths and hundreds of arbitrary arrests, according to credible human rights organizations. We are particularly disturbed by reports that medical personnel have been targeted while attempting to help people injured at the hands of their own Government, and by reports that the injured fear seeking medical attention at hospitals owing to the presence of Syrian secret police. We urge the Syrian Government to allow foreign media, diplomats and human rights organizations to independently verify humanitarian conditions throughout all of Syria. Finally, we urge the Syrian Government to respect the human rights of its people and to implement meaningful political reforms that meet their legitimate aspirations.

Let me close by restating my Government's deeply held commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people in the region and around the world, including the freedoms of expression and association. We demand accountability wherever those freedoms are violated. We urge all Governments to create an environment in which journalists can carry out their work free from fear and intimidation. We call on all Governments to protect civilians, not to attack them, and to respect their citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and free expression.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): At the outset, we would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing and to stress again the leading role that we believe the United Nations should play in the resolution of the Middle East conflict.

It is clear that the prevailing sentiment in the Arab world is one of deep frustration following the failure of this Council earlier this year to express itself on the critical issue of Israeli settlements, even though the draft resolution (S/2011/24) that my delegation had presented to the Council had been sponsored by an unprecedented number of States. It is a critical issue indeed, not only because settlements are illegal and obstruct peace, but also because they undermine the two-State solution and continue to sow the seeds of hatred that will yield more and more violence in the absence of peace.

Arabs are not only frustrated with the failure of the Council earlier this year to pronounce itself on the illegality of all Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, but they are also outraged that, two years after the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), Israel continues its illegal and immoral blockade of the Gaza Strip and its repeated attacks against its civilian population. It is the duty of the Council to compel Israel to abide by its responsibilities under international law and international humanitarian law, as well as Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, to protect the civilians of Gaza and those throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

What we are witnessing today is how the Israeli Government continues to choose the expansion of settlements over peace. In doing so, it is also deliberately choosing to block the United States-lead peace efforts, rather than to help them succeed. Above all, it is knowingly choosing to continue to defy international law and the will of the international community, as expressed by all the main organs of the United Nations, namely, this Council, the General Assembly and the International Court of justice.

Settlement-building is certainly not a trivial issue, as the Prime Minister of Israel said. In fact, in addition to evictions and house demolitions, residency revocations and land confiscations, settlement-building is part of a campaign that is eating up Palestinian land

and seeks to change the identity and legal status of East Jerusalem.

We are extremely concerned at and disappointed by the postponement of the Quartet meeting initially scheduled for 14 March, and later rescheduled for 15 April but again postponed. In spite of our strong reservations at the manner in which Israel dealt with the previously planned separate meetings of the Quartet with the parties, we continue to support the Quartet and believe that it must adopt and clearly spell out the well-known parameters for the resolution of the conflict, in particular the 1967 lines as the basis of the Palestinian State.

The Quartet should further set a clear timetable up to August 2011 for negotiations on the final status issues and ensure that the goal of a free and independent Palestinian State with full membership in the United Nations is realized by September of this year.

In contrast, such interim approaches as the idea of a provisional arrangement, short of a two-State solution and even without Palestinian agreement, are now clearly inconclusive and completely unacceptable 20 years after the Madrid Peace Conference, 18 years after the Oslo interim accords and eight years after the Road Map.

On the question of Palestinian statehood, let me, like Mr. Pascoe, underline that in its report to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Brussels on 13 April, entitled "Palestinian State-building: a decisive period", the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process concluded that

> "in the limited territory under its control and within the constraints on the ground imposed by unresolved political issues, the Palestinian Authority has accelerated progress in improving its governmental functions".

In the areas enumerated by Mr. Pascoe where the United Nations is most engaged, the same report confirmed that "governmental functions are now sufficient for a functioning Government of a State".

However, the report adds:

> "Despite the progress achieved, the key constraints to the existence and successful functioning of the institutions of a potential State of Palestine arise primarily from the persistence of occupation and the unresolved issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ... [M]easures of occupation which stifle Palestinian life [need to be] fundamentally rolled back ... It is vitally important that the State-building and political processes be brought into alignment by September 2011."

In turn, the World Bank, in its 13 April economic monitoring report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, reiterates:

> "The World Bank has noted in previous reports to meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) that if the Palestinian Authority (PA) maintains its performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future."

The report concludes:

> "Since the last AHLC meeting, the PA has continued to strengthen its institutions, delivering public services and promoting reforms that many existing States struggle with."

Finally, let me quote from the International Monetary Fund staff report "Macroeconomic and Fiscal Framework for the West Bank and Gaza", submitted to the same Brussels meeting. It considers that:

> "The Palestinian Authority (PA) is now able to conduct the sound economic policies expected of a future well-functioning Palestinian State, given its solid track record in reforms and institution-building in the public finance and financial areas. Steady reforms in the public finance management system have enabled the PA to tightly control expenditures, apply rigorous budget preparation and execution practices, and establish fiscal transparency and accountability in line with international standards."

In that regard, a Security Council trip to the Middle East would not only assert the role of this Council in the peace process and its responsibility towards international peace and security, but also offer all members of the Council the opportunity to have a first-hand and on-the-ground assessment of the Government functions carried out by the Palestinian

institutions and to judge how sufficient they have become for a functioning Government of a State.

The Arab world is witnessing an unprecedented momentum for change. People across the region are now voicing their aspirations to freedom, dignity and a better life. However, let us keep in mind that the greatest source of frustration in our region remains the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict and the historic injustice to the Palestinian people.

A lasting peace in our part of the world needs to be a comprehensive and just peace. Accordingly, it will also require that Israel fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from the remaining occupied parts of southern Lebanon.

Mr. Parham (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

Over the past few months, we have witnessed seismic shifts across the Middle East. There have been tragic events, the loss of innocent lives and Governments' brutal repression of aspirations to change. However, there has also been the inspirational determination of people to struggle for their universal rights against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The key lesson has been that people's aspiration to freedom cannot be crushed. The only credible answer to legitimate popular demands is sustainable reform.

As we speak, events continue to unfold across the region, including in Yemen and Syria. We unequivocally condemn the violence against and, indeed, the killing of peaceful demonstrators by the security forces of both countries. Both Governments must respect the right to peaceful protest and free speech, address the legitimate aspirations of the protesters, bring forward the reforms that have been promised by Presidents Saleh and Al-Assad, and ensure that those reforms mark the start of a sustainable transition to new political systems that meet the aspirations of their people.

Such events in the wider Middle East are relevant to the efforts to find a long-term solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just as populations in the region are finding their voices and, in some cases, winning their rights, Palestinians, too, must realize their goal for a viable independent State of Palestine. It would be a great shame and, indeed, a source of continued instability if the hopes of the Palestinian people were left unfulfilled while the region is transformed around them.

It is therefore crucial that urgent progress in the peace process be made. We are fast approaching September, which is the time frame set out by President Obama and the Quartet to welcome Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations, and the month that will mark the completion of the Palestinian Authority's State-building programme. If progress is to be made, the current impasse must be broken. The parties should commit to a new phase of direct negotiations. In order for negotiations to be credible, they must be based on a clearly articulated set of parameters that are well known to us all: two States based on the 1967 borders with equivalent land swaps; security arrangements that protect Palestinian sovereignty, while also providing sufficient assurance to Israel; Jerusalem as the capital of both States; and a just solution for refugees.

For there to be credible progress, the leaders of both parties must do more to narrow the gulf between them and to counter the growing lack of trust. I would highlight three points.

First, they must do more to avoid violence, strengthen accountability, reduce tensions and avoid further loss of innocent lives. The recent escalation in violence is of great concern and only serves to widen the gulf between Palestinians and Israelis. The surge in rocket attacks from Gaza that have injured Israeli citizens has to stop. Those responsible for the recent attacks on a Jerusalem bus station and an Israeli school bus must be brought to justice. Israel has a right to defend its citizens, but it must take care to avoid civilian casualties. As we have heard, action in Gaza over the past month has killed 18 civilians, including four children.

Secondly, settlement activity, which has continued apace in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, must stop. It is illegal and undermines trust and the prospects for peace. We condemn Israel's decision to approve more than 900 settlement units in Gilo and the retrospective approval for construction in five West Bank settlements. The Israeli authorities should reconsider their decisions.

Thirdly, there needs to be improved access to Gaza. Its isolation only breeds radicalism, extremism and violence. However, the answer is not more flotillas, which are likely only to provoke violence and

do not provide a solution. Israel must speed up the approvals process for international projects and move forward with the proposal of the Office of the Quartet Representative for imports of construction materials by private companies.

Skepticism about the prospects for peace in the Middle East is not in short supply, but it is incumbent upon both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to look beyond immediate obstacles, to rise above domestic pressures and to give their people a sense of optimism for the future. As I said at the start, the lesson of the past months across the Middle East has been that people's demands cannot be crushed. Each country in the region faces a unique set of circumstances, but at the very core of all the protests has been a desire for basic freedoms. Those aspirations must be met. That is as true for Palestinians as it is for Libyans, Tunisians, Egyptians, Yemenis or Syrians.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): First of all, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing, even if it was a particularly sombre one.

Dramatic events in the region are quickly changing the face of the Middle East, presenting its people with tremendous challenges but also with far-reaching opportunities. The one and only way to address such daunting challenges is through dialogue and reform.

Portugal unequivocally condemns the use of force against peaceful demonstrations. We are concerned by increasing levels of violence in a number of countries in the region and deplore the many deaths it has caused. We urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint. We are particularly worried and shocked by the number of children falling victim to this violence, as reported by UNICEF, and call upon all parties to protect children from direct and indirect effects of violence. Violence and repression can never be the answer. Only genuine comprehensive and inclusive dialogue will allow the important issues at stake to be addressed and solved in a peaceful and sustainable way that meets the legitimate aspirations expressed by peoples in several countries.

The winds of change sweeping through the Middle East render progress on the Arab-Israeli peace process all the more pressing. The status quo is simply not sustainable. The absence of a timely comprehensive settlement will only further undermine confidence, exacerbate tensions and propitiate more violence.

At the core of this regional conflict is the six-decade-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbours will remain elusive in the absence of an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. Decisive action and strong political will are needed to relaunch negotiations and bring them to a meaningful conclusion. As the Under-Secretary-General recalled, violence is yet again on the rise in the region.

Portugal vehemently condemns the heinous killing of a settler family in Itamar and the fatal terrorist attack in East Jerusalem last month. The perpetrators of such odious crimes must be brought to justice and held accountable for their acts. We are also concerned by the rising violence between settlers and Palestinians. Unjustifiable actions cannot be redeemed by vindictive retaliation taken against innocent individuals.

Violence in and around Gaza also continues to escalate. Only last week, an Italian human rights activist was brutally murdered. Portugal unequivocally condemns the indiscriminate firing of mortars and rockets by militant groups in Gaza and calls for their immediate halt. The targeting of an obvious civilian objective such as a school bus merits absolute condemnation.

We recognize Israel's right to self-defence, consistent with international law and international humanitarian law. But we also urge it to use maximum restraint and ensure that civilians are not endangered. Attacks on civilians are completely unacceptable in any circumstances. We appeal to all parties to act responsibly and avoid further and very dangerous escalation.

We also note with concern the continued captivity of Staff Sergeant Shalit and call for his immediate release. It is unacceptable that he continues to be detained and denied access in violation of humanitarian law and practice.

Portugal welcomes the positive steps taken by the Government of Israel concerning the easing of the closure of Gaza. Nevertheless, as stated by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee last week,

> "more is needed for a fundamental change of the situation in the Gaza Strip. A lasting recovery will require a removal of the ban on exports and private sector imports of investment inputs, as

well as lifting restrictions on the legitimate passage of people".

Likewise, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains one of great concern. We thus reiterate our call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). It is in the interest of everyone, and particularly of Israel, not to reinforce extremism or foster a more broadly radicalized environment in Gaza.

Once again, we join the international community in appealing to Israel to cease all settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These settlement activities, including natural growth, are illegal under international law. They undermine trust between the parties, erode the prerequisites for a two-State solution and constitute an obstacle to peace.

It is thus unacceptable that settlement construction proceeds unabated and that plans for its extension continue to be announced regularly. Also, regrettably, evictions and demolitions continue to render Palestinians homeless throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, depriving many families of their livelihoods. Likewise, an increasing number of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have been denied their right to live in the city.

Reuniting the West Bank and Gaza also remains an important objective. Portugal fully supports the efforts of President Abbas in favour of Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the Palestinian Authority and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Let me reiterate what I have often said here. Portugal condemns all actions that undermine trust and opposes all unilateral actions that prejudge the outcome of negotiations on final status issues, including Jerusalem. On the contrary, it is by building trust and building on trust that Israelis and Palestinians will be able to settle their differences and ensure a lasting and comprehensive peace.

The foregoing brings me to the crux of our concern. Peace between Israelis and Palestinians can be reached only through a direct, genuine and politically negotiated process leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. The dual deadline for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on permanent status issues and completing the Palestinian two-year State-building plan is fast approaching. Yet, the negotiations process is at a standstill. The Quartet was due to meet in March. The April meeting was again postponed. Portugal wishes for a new meeting to be scheduled as soon as possible and encourages the active involvement of the Quartet to bring the negotiations process forward.

It is essential that the international community clearly set out the parameters of a peace agreement and a clear calendar to attain this objective. As underscored by the four European Union countries in the Security Council in their explanations of vote on 18 February, when we voted on the draft resolution on settlements (see S/PV.6484), direct negotiations should seek to achieve, first, an agreement on the borders of the two States based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps as may be agreed between the parties; secondly, security arrangements that respect the sovereignty of the Palestinians, end the occupation and protect Israel's security; thirdly, a just solution to the refugee question; and lastly, the fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem, solving through negotiations the status of the city as the future capital of both States. That is also the position of the European Union, which will be expressed later on in this debate.

At the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels last week, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations concurred that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning State in a number of key sectors, and is close to reaching the objectives of the State-building programme. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority's institution-building achievements can be sustainable only if they are matched with progress in the peace talks. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas set for themselves the goal of reaching a framework agreement on all core issues by September. It is vitally important that by then the State-building and political process be brought into alignment. We thus again urge the parties to resume with the utmost urgency meaningful direct negotiations.

While we welcome all the measures aimed at supporting the Palestinian Authority State-building exercise and the economic development of the occupied Palestinian territory, those measures are not to be considered as a substitute for timely negotiations on all final status issues. Likewise, as events all throughout the region are showing us, temporary and interim solutions are simply not an option, either.

The peace we all hope for in the Middle East is a lasting and comprehensive one that would enable the full integration of Israel into its regional environment. A breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, would contribute to appease a region in turmoil. The Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon tracks are equally important and need to be pursued in tandem.

The region is living through times of change. Israelis and Palestinians must seize this opportunity to engage diligently and fruitfully with each other. Now is the moment for bold and brave leadership to focus on the only solution that can bring sustainable peace and prosperity to Israelis and Palestinians alike: an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

I would like to say a few words on the situation in Lebanon. Portugal hopes for the formation of a new Government in keeping with the provisions of the Constitution. We expect a new Government, once formed, to fulfil its obligations under all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), and to reiterate its commitment to all international obligations, including those concerning the Special Tribunal.

We remain concerned by the almost daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty by Israeli overflights of Lebanon, which exacerbate tensions in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon area of operations. Portugal reaffirms its full support for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence and the need for its sovereignty to be fully respected in land, sea and air.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. I, too, have listened carefully to the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel. China has always advocated for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by political diplomatic means on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Road Map for peace. The ultimate goal is to establish an independent Palestinian State, with full sovereignty and living side by side with Israel in peace.

At present, the Israeli-Palestinian talks are at a standstill. China opposes Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are not conducive to breaking the deadlock or to establishing mutual political trust. We hope that Israel will exercise restraint and caution, and adopt practical measures to create conditions conducive to the early resumption of the talks between the two sides.

China is deeply concerned about the escalating tension in the Gaza Strip. China hopes that the parties will effectively honour the ceasefire commitments they made recently, exercise restraint, refrain from unilateral and provocative actions and avoid unnecessary innocent civilian casualties so as to stabilize the situation and restore calm on the ground.

Without progress, the Middle East peace process will suffer setbacks. In the face of increasing difficulties, the international community should be more coordinated and united as it steps up its efforts to promote peace talks and spare no effort to promote the resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine as soon as possible and to secure the advancement of the peace process.

We hope that the Quartet will play an active role in finding a solution that can break the impasse in the Middle East. At this critical juncture, China supports a greater role for the Security Council in finding a solution to the question of the Middle East.

Peace talks on other tracks, including the Lebanon-Israel and Syria-Israel tracks, should also be promoted in parallel. All of the parties concerned should seek to create conditions conducive to a resumption of dialogue and negotiations and to bringing the prolonged confrontation and tension in the region to an end.

China has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and has provided assistance, within its abilities, to help ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and assist them in their State-building efforts. China supports all efforts aimed at facilitating the Middle East peace process and will continue to play a positive and constructive role in promoting the achievement of a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Amieyeofori (Nigeria): I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his comprehensive briefing.

For more than two decades, the Middle East peace process has been mediated diligently by the international community. Undoubtedly, the process has been characterized by rigorous negotiations, hints of progress and compromise, followed by seemingly intractable political stalemates. With the failure of the parties to resume direct negotiations, we are witnessing another moment of uncertainty. The parties must now demonstrate their undivided commitment to peace and remove all impediments to the resumption of direct negotiations to resolve the outstanding permanent status issues.

While it is regrettable that the meeting of the Quartet scheduled for this month failed to take place, we welcome the prospect of new proposals by the United States and Israeli authorities to re-open the stalled talks. We believe, however, that the Quartet Road Map offers a viable pathway to peace and progress. The parties should embrace it as a basis for substantive engagement towards the creation of an independent Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel by the end of this year. This goal will be difficult to achieve if the vicious cycle of violence, attacks and reprisals continues in the region.

However, there are a number of specific actions that are certain to foster mutual respect and compromise, build confidence, and pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution. In this regard, we encourage Israel to take concrete steps to freeze all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The planned construction of new settler homes will provide fodder for resentment and increased violence. In the same vein, military incursions into Gaza and retaliation for militant attacks are unhelpful to the peace process.

Palestinian leaders must signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by making enhanced efforts to forge unity and deal with militancy and other internal security challenges. It is beyond doubt that neither military might nor militancy will resolve the protracted conflict. We therefore reiterate our condemnation of recent rocket attacks on southern Israel by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, and call for maximum restraint from both sides.

A prisoner-exchange programme between the two sides at this point in time would no doubt ease tensions and build trust, as would the unconditional release of Gilad Shalit after more than five years in detention.

The key lesson we must draw from the tragic events of 31 May 2010 is that confrontation must be avoided in the future delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. While we commend Israel for further easing the blockade on Gaza, we stress its obligation to provide unhindered access for humanitarian and other goods into Gaza. At the same time, we urge the people of Gaza to utilize only legitimate channels to transport persons, goods and materials out of the territory in order to address Israel's legitimate security concerns. In this regard, we note the positive role the Palestinian Authority is playing in addressing Israel's security concerns.

The fragile security situations in North Africa and parts of the Middle East present challenges and fresh opportunities that demand renewed vigilance and commitment to peace by all stakeholders. It is in that regard that we welcome the proposal by the Russian delegation for a visit to the Middle East at an appropriate time and believe that this will further strengthen our collective resolve for peace in the Middle East, even as we are optimistic that, with our collective engagement, the vision of statehood can be achieved before the end of the year.

With regard to Lebanon, we support its sovereignty and territorial integrity and urge the new Government to remain steadfast in the implementation of its international obligations, including resolution 1701 (2006). In that connection, we welcome the Government's pledge to assist the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and restore regional peace and security in line with that resolution. We urge Israel to halt further incursions into Lebanese territory to avoid an escalation of violence. We also stress the importance of maintaining calm along the Blue Line.

On the Golan Heights, we encourage Israel and Syria to seek a mutually acceptable solution. We underscore the need for all parties to engage in fruitful dialogue and longer-term political reconciliation, even in the face of provocations.

Finally, by acting together to build confidence, the search for peace will be significantly enhanced. In words and deeds, the parties should demonstrate a strong desire to re-engage in a negotiated settlement of all the core issues of the conflict.

Ms. Čolaković (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his

update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their presence and their contribution to our debate.

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be concerned about the absence of any progress in the Middle East peace process. We strongly believe that time is not on the side of the parties concerned and fear that the prolonged impasse is making the necessary positive breakthrough more difficult.

Our concerns are further heightened by reports of the latest escalation in violence, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms. We fully concur with the Secretary-General's call for respect for international humanitarian law, de-escalation and calm to prevent any further bloodshed.

We cannot but underscore the fact that the scheduled time frame for the conclusion of peace negotiations is rapidly approaching, while the Israelis and Palestinians appear to be no closer to even the resumption of direct talks. In such circumstances, it is perfectly clear that urgent, bold and responsible moves are needed in order to end the ongoing erosion in the Middle East peace process.

We would like to recall that it is also the responsibility of the Security Council, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and other international and regional actors to help the parties transform this deplorable state of affairs into a politically sustainable negotiating process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is deeply disappointed by the approval of 942 new housing units in Israel's settlement in Gilo, East Jerusalem, and the upcoming plans for new settlements. We reiterate that all settlement activities on occupied land are illegal under international law and contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. These activities therefore represent an obstacle on the road to comprehensive peace. Bosnia and Herzegovina calls upon Israel to respond positively to appeals by the international community and end all settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem, and underlines that the status of Jerusalem is a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.

I would like to stress once again that, for my country, any act of violence against civilians is unacceptable, wherever it originates. We would also like to reiterate that civilian populations must be protected. All violence must stop immediately, in particular terrorist attacks and mortar and rocket fire. Therefore, we urge the parties to observe restraint and make every effort to avoid further escalation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina believes that securing lasting peace and stability in the region of the Middle East is possible only through diplomatic efforts and full commitment to the peace process. We therefore urge both Israelis and Palestinians to immediately start the unconditional implementation of their obligations as stipulated by the relevant resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Road Map and the agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

With regard to the situation in the Gaza Strip, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Israeli security concerns, including a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling into Gaza, must also be addressed.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain committed to the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. In order to achieve this goal of fundamental interest to all parties in the Middle East, the Israelis and Palestinians have to make the decisions necessary to overcome this extremely worrisome impasse and return to direct talks without delay. Bosnia and Herzegovina urges them to do so.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

France associates itself with the statement to be made by the head of the delegation of the European Union.

I would like to bring up the following points. The Council is today considering a peace process that is making no progress in a region that is experiencing a remarkable groundswell of popular will. Tunisia and Egypt are currently managing their post-revolutionary periods and, together with the European Union, we confirmed our full support to them during this demanding phase of democratic transition.

In Bahrain, we must encourage the resumption of dialogue so that the current difficulties can be overcome in the interests of all Bahrainis.

Other situations, namely, in Yemen and Syria, are also of concern to us. We call for the necessary respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We support the mediation efforts carried out by the Gulf Cooperation Council. We call on all Yemeni parties to immediately begin a constructive dialogue under its auspices, leading to a peaceful political transition.

In Syria, the authorities must renounce the use of force against demonstrators and translate into facts, without further delay, the announced reforms, especially the lifting of the state of emergency, in order to respond to the aspirations of the population. The end of repression, the release of all political prisoners and respect for the right to peacefully demonstrate and for the freedom of the press must be implemented. Arrests must be stopped and light must be shed on recent events. An inclusive political dialogue should take place for effective political reforms that will respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, thereby contributing to the country's stability.

In Libya, we call on the international community, especially the Tripoli regime, to respect Security Council resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011). Until there is respect for a genuine, verifiable and lasting ceasefire that meets the requirements of the international community, the coalition will continue its actions aimed at protecting the civilian population and ensuring respect for the no-fly zone and the arms embargo. We welcome the role played by the Secretary-General and the United Nations to ensure that everywhere, dialogue and respect for fundamental freedoms prevail over violence.

The aspirations of the Palestinian people to a visible, sovereign State living in peace and security side by side with Israel are no less legitimate than the concerns expressed throughout the region. We must respond to those aspirations and to those of the Israeli people to regional security and integrity.

France believes that there can be no alternative to a negotiated solution to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is why for several months now we have been advocating that the Quartet endorse the parameters we defined in this very Chamber on 18 February, so that direct negotiations can resume between the parties on that basis with respect to all final-status-related questions. The postponement once again of the Quartet meeting, which we deplore, will not help us to draw closer to that goal. Quartet envoys will meet on 5 May; they must work to ensure that a meeting of principals is held as soon as possible.

A long-lasting impasse in the peace process could jeopardize the credibility of the two-State solution and lead to a deterioration of the situation on the ground. France remains determined to see that significant progress is made before the September 2011 deadline set by the Quartet.

The recognition of a State of Palestine is one of the options that France is considering, together with its European partners, with the goal of creating political prospects conducive to a resumption of the peace process. If we were to adopt this solution, it should encourage the resumption of negotiations on the basis of internationally known parameters. The reaffirmation of our unwavering support for the State of Israel is paired with a clear political message aimed at dissuading both parties from pursuing unilateral strategies or imposing faits accomplis on the ground that would hinder our efforts to achieve peace.

In that connection, our stance on settlements is a consistent one: settlements are illegal under international law; they undermine confidence between the parties; and they pose a threat to the two-State solution. It is for that reason that, subsequently to the open debate held in February (see S/PV.6470), we voted in favour of the draft resolution submitted to the Council. We call on Israel to abandon any further construction activities, which are to be reviewed shortly.

We have taken note of the announcement that a speech will be made by President Obama and a diplomatic initiative undertaken by the Israeli Prime

Minister, to be presented to the United States Congress on 24 May. We do not know the terms of those initiatives, but we are, of course, prepared to support any effort aimed at relaunching a dynamic involving direct negotiations. Any proposal targeted at advancing the peace process must be based on a set of credible parameters that will make it possible to overcome the crisis of confidence between the parties.

Eighteen years after the launch of the Oslo peace process, we no longer have time to consider new, interim solutions. Measures aimed at improving the situation on the ground are welcome, but they cannot be an end in and of themselves; they must be linked to prospects for a definitive solution and cannot substitute for it.

If we do not respond to the aspirations for peace expressed by the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, the recent upsurge of violence in Gaza makes clear that there is a risk of a flare-up. We condemn the Itamar assassination and the firing of rockets, missiles and shells at the civilian population in the south of Israel. We call for respect for international humanitarian law in the case of Gilad Shalit. The firing of an anti-tank missile at an Israeli school bus marked a new stage in the violence. We also condemn the humanitarian consequences of the Israeli operations undertaken in response to those attacks, which led to several civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) offers a suitable framework for the implementation of a durable truce, for which we call.

We continue to call for the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in all its aspects, especially in connection with the need to lift the blockade and the provision of access for humanitarian goods to the territory, which should take place through existing channels established by the Israeli authorities.

In Gaza, too, we must respond to the aspirations of the people through a fundamental change of policy without compromising Israel's legitimate security concerns. It is imperative that the measures aimed at easing the blockade, which were put in place in June 2010, be implemented, including with respect to the authorization of exports of commercial goods and the liberalization of conditions for the movement of individuals. The people of Gaza have also expressed their desire for Palestinian unity, and we wish to affirm our support for President Abbas in his efforts to respond.

In this very volatile context, we cannot overlook the regional aspect of the peace process. In Lebanon, we hope that the parties will show restraint and continue to cooperate, in the framework of the Tripartite Commission, in order to avert any problems along the Blue Line. A new Government has not yet been formed, but the Lebanese authorities must respect all of the country's international obligations, especially those related to the Special Tribunal and resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, I wish once again to stress the international community's pressing obligation not to allow this impasse, which has lasted more than seven months, to continue. The conclusions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians have strengthened our conviction that the Palestinians are more than ever prepared to establish their State and to administer it in a credible and responsible manner. To let the stalemate continue without responding to the expectations raised by the prospects offered by September 2011 — prospects that were underlined by President Obama — would be to undermine the only tangible asset towards the creation of a Palestinian State — the Fayyad plan. To consolidate the gains made, in June France will organize a donor conference for the State of Palestine. However, that exercise will be a meaningful one only if it is linked to the indispensable resumption of the political process, the conditions for which I recalled earlier.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of the European Union.

Members of the Council, whenever they were meeting on the situation in the Middle East in recent months, were entirely in agreement on the urgency of making progress in the Middle East peace process. With little more than four months to go until September, this sense of urgency is growing considerably. Every day that passes without the re-establishment of a credible political process is a lost day. We must not allow this to continue; risks are growing, and chances are dwindling. We must overcome the deadlock and re-establish a credible political process, well in advance of the September deadlines.

We want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. There is no alternative to the two-State solution. Making decisive progress by September is possible, and the window of opportunity is still open.

Negotiations are the only viable way forward. The international community must set a framework. We remain convinced that clear parameters are a prerequisite if negotiations are to be successful. Germany set out its view on parameters along with the United Kingdom and France on 18 February in the Council (see S/PV.6484), supported by EU member States and many others. We call on the Quartet to work in this direction and to bring about the progress required prior to the September deadline it has itself endorsed. Within this context, we look forward to the speech President Obama will deliver on the region. Strong United States leadership is required.

The parties must commit unequivocally to returning to meaningful direct negotiations on this basis as soon as possible and without setting additional conditions. We call on President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu to show flexibility and, within this context, on the Prime Minister to open a forward-looking perspective in his address to Congress.

Germany remains strongly opposed to unilateral action impacting on final status issues, whether from the Palestinian or from the Israeli side. Seeking statehood through unilateral steps will not bring sustainable peace. Israeli settlement activity should cease immediately. It is illegal under international law, constitutes an obstacle to peace and threatens to make a two-State solution impossible. New construction plans should be abandoned. All members of the Council are in agreement that continued settlement activity seriously threatens the prospects for peace.

Gaza remains a serious concern. Developments over the past two weeks have demonstrated once again the fragility of the current situation. A ceasefire agreed on 14 April held for only three days. Germany strongly condemns the continued firing of rockets and mortars into Israeli territory, in particular the targeting of a school bus with an anti-tank missile. This type of action is utterly unacceptable. Germany recognizes Israel's right to protect its citizens against attacks. At the same time, we look to Israel to exercise this right judiciously. The loss of civilian lives in Gaza is deeply regrettable. Further escalation must be prevented.

We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, who has been held hostage for almost five years now.

We would like to express our concern with regard to a possible second Gaza flotilla. The planned activities bear considerable potential for escalation. In line with what was said by Lynn Pascoe earlier, we call on the organizations involved to find other ways to deliver aid to the people of Gaza. The appropriate way ahead is the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) calling for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for goods and people to and from Gaza, and for the prevention of the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition. In this context, we call on all international supporters to make use of the existing land crossings to channel their support to Gaza, and to abstain from provocations.

Despite the concerns to which I have referred, there is some positive news as well. On 13 April, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians met and acknowledged the Palestinian Authority's State-building efforts, stating that the Authority is above the threshold for a functioning State in the key sectors. Germany has been a major donor to the Palestinian Authority, nationally and through the EU. We have made a major political and financial investment in Palestinian State-building. This investment has been made to achieve a two-State solution and sustainable peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

For too long, the people of the Middle East have suffered from conflict and confrontation. It is time to reach a final and comprehensive settlement that will resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and end the occupation that began in 1967. The status quo is not sustainable. Our goal remains a framework agreement on all final status issues by September. Germany will contribute to achieving this goal.

The deteriorating situation in Syria, violence across that country and the rising death toll remain of serious concern. We condemn the use of force by security forces against peaceful demonstrators, and call on Syria to address the legitimate demands of the Syrian people by urgently implementing a credible programme of political reforms as a path to long-term stability. We acknowledge the Syrian Government's

announcements of reforms, including the lifting of the state of emergency today through decree No. 161. If fully and swiftly implemented, it could be a first step in a wider programme of necessary reforms.

In Yemen, the protests against the Government of President Saleh have risen sharply in number and strength since their onset in January 2011. The security situation, in particular, and continued news of violence coming from many Yemeni cities continue to give rise to great concern. Despite a wide range of efforts, also by members of the international community, we are facing an intractable political impasse that has put the country at the brink of a political and economic tragedy. We call on the Government of Yemen to abide by its responsibility to respect and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons, including their freedom of expression, to ensure safety and to prevent further bloodshed. Likewise, the opposition should show restraint and its determination to engage in a peaceful dialogue about Yemen's future.

It must be clear to all parties concerned that Yemen's problems cannot be solved with violence. The future of the country has to be laid out by a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue and courageous reforms. We fully support the mediation efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council in this regard. All Yemeni actors are called upon to engage in these negotiations towards a peaceful future for the Yemeni people.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

I begin by expressing profound sorrow over the loss of innocent life in the recent escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. The death of a 16-year-old Israeli boy in an attack on a school bus and the killings of civilians — including children — as a result of Israeli reprisals against militants in the Gaza Strip are appalling. We were also dismayed by the killing of Italian peace activist Vittorio Arrigoni by extremists in Gaza. Brazil condemns these heinous attacks in the strongest terms. Violence by settlers and against settlers has reached shocking levels. All involved in such acts must be brought to justice. All parties must respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

All this has occurred as the stalemate in the peace process regrettably persists in spite of broad consensus on the urgent need for concrete decisions. Brazil was deeply disappointed at the new postponement of the Quartet's meeting. Unfortunately, this lack of movement creates a void in which radicals thrive.

That is why we continue to advocate that this Council should play a greater role in support of the peace process. We also welcome the proposal for a Security Council mission to the region. Twenty years after Madrid, 18 years after Oslo, and eight years since the Road Map, the painful cost of the absence of progress is more visible than ever. It is time for bold decisions that set forth the well-known parameters of an agreement on all final status issues.

It is unfortunate that illegal settlement activity is continuing. This logic further distances the political discourse from reality as regards the two-State solution. We fail to see how such a policy can advance the security concerns of Israel and its citizens, whose legitimacy we fully recognize and seek to advance. Settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is illegal and an obstacle to peace. It has become the single most serious threat to the two-State solution and to the prospects for peace. It stands in defiance of international law and the very set of international norms and institutions that serve the purpose of protecting civilians, including in Israel. It runs counter to the decisions of the Security Council and threatens the viability of the future Palestinian State.

We welcome the report submitted to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee last week by the Special Coordinator for the Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, on the progress of the State-building efforts carried out by the Palestinian Authority. We commend the Palestinian Authority on the remarkable achievements in all areas of its State-building programme in a manner consistent with the goal of establishing the functioning institutions of the Palestinian State by this fall. Such achievement must be reinforced with concrete steps in the peace negotiations.

The situation in Gaza remains a source of grave concern. We welcome the implementation of measures by Israel aimed at alleviating the suffering of the population, specially the approval of United Nations projects at a higher rate. These are positives steps, although access to basic goods and services remains vastly insufficient. The lifting of the blockade is urgently required, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009).

The historic events and changes taking place in the broader Middle East are a natural expression of legitimate aspirations for political and economic progress and social justice. We support those aspirations. It is also natural that those events, coming from within, run different courses in different national contexts. Principles and values, nevertheless, apply across the board. As a matter of coherence, the international community cannot tolerate violence against unarmed civilians, regardless of where it is committed.

At the same time, we call on leaders facing peaceful demonstrations to uphold basic freedoms and to engage in meaningful dialogue towards needed reforms. Statesmanship, broad vision and political will are essential to addressing the legitimate demands of the respective populations in an environment of peace and stability.

Let me say a word on the situation in Lebanon. We look forward to the formation of a new Government in a process that runs its course in a peaceful manner and in line with the constitutional framework. A democratic, prosperous, stable and sovereign Lebanon will continue to be a fundamental dimension of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): My delegation would like to express its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing to the Council. My delegation would also like to associate itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As we gather here today to consider the situation in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the uprisings that have engulfed the region and the Arab world in general. These developments have so far resulted in the fall of long-standing regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The authorities in other countries in the region are being challenged by their populations. The international community will certainly gather some important lessons from this historic chapter. What is clear is that the status quo in which the rights of people have gone unfulfilled for decades cannot continue. In that light, the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved. The two peoples deserve to live in peace and security.

The September deadline by which we hope to achieve a viable, independent and contiguous Palestinian State is almost upon us. Yet, the parties do not seem any nearer to returning to the negotiating table to achieve that goal. A return to negotiations by both sides is critical. However, Israel's continued disrespect for the decisions of the Security Council, and the United Nations in general, by continuing to build illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains an obstacle. These actions change facts on the ground and make agreement on final status issues much more difficult to achieve. The inability of the Council to adopt a resolution condemning such action despite the overwhelming support for it is unfortunate. We nonetheless call on Israel to respect the myriad resolutions adopted by the Council and immediately cease the construction of illegal settlements.

We had hoped that today's debate would have taken place after a meeting of the Quartet, whose outcome we had hoped would have been critical to the resumption of direct negotiations. We had expected the Quartet to take up its responsibility and draw parameters within which the parties could constructively engage. Those parameters essentially include an agreement on the borders of the two States based on the 4 June 1967 lines, security arrangements, a just, fair and agreed solution to the refugee question and the fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem. We urge the Quartet, of which we as the United Nations are an essential part, to convene soon to proceed on that basis.

Intra-Palestinian unity is essential to move the peace process forward. We encourage all efforts to achieve that important objective. In that regard, we welcome the ongoing negotiations between Fatah and Hamas and hope that they will yield a positive result. We also welcome the Palestinian announcement to hold elections before September.

South Africa welcomes the Palestinian institution-building efforts under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayyad. We urge the international community to continue to support those initiatives.

With regard to Gaza, we remain deeply concerned about Israel's continued blockade. The international community's demand that Israel end the illegal blockade that has exacerbated the suffering of ordinary civilians must be adhered to. The blockade and the restrictions being imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law, including article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as contrary to the will of the international community as expressed in

resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009).

We reiterate the call for accountability for crimes committed during the 2008-2009 Gaza conflict. In that regard, in order to ensure justice, it is vital for the parties to implement the recommendations of the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48).

South Africa also stresses the urgency of reconstruction in Gaza. We call upon the international community to exert serious efforts to compel Israel to allow for the entry of all necessary construction materials for at least the repair of destroyed and damaged humanitarian infrastructure and United Nations facilities, including schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in order that dignity can be restored to the people of Gaza. We also stress the necessity of sustained commercial activity, including both imports and exports, to promote the economic recovery of livelihoods, businesses and industry in Gaza.

We condemn the recent attacks from both Gaza and southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of civilians, including school children. We urge the parties to exercise restrain and to refrain from using indiscriminate missile and other forms of air attacks, which further exacerbate tensions in the area and bring further untold suffering to ordinary civilians.

Israeli military attacks earlier this month on Gaza, which led to civilian deaths, should be condemned. We urge Israel to exercise restraint in defending itself, to ensure that its actions do not harm innocent civilians.

South Africa also joins those calling for the release of the Israeli Staff Sergeant, as well as the many Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli jails.

In conclusion, we believe that the current developments in the Arab world will undoubtedly have a bearing on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. In our search for a solution to the Palestinian question, it is now clearer than ever that we must not lose sight of the broader regional question to which Palestine is inextricably linked. We therefore call on the Council and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

Mr. Pankin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on developments in the Middle East. We have listened attentively to the statements by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

As the Middle East is going through an unprecedentedly intense and historic period, with problems that have accumulated over the years becoming more and more acute, the task of achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement is especially pressing. To attempt to sidestep this fundamental issue of Middle Eastern politics would be a serious mistake. Unfortunately, instead of stepping up international efforts, which the Russian Federation has consistently called for, we have already seen the ministerial meeting of the members of the Quartet postponed twice — and this time to an as yet undetermined date. This is deeply disappointing, particularly since we and our partners had already done much preparatory work ahead of the meeting.

Today as never before, Israelis and Palestinians need international assistance to transcend their mutual mistrust, forge constructive dialogue on the familiar international legal foundations, and move towards a mutually acceptable two-State solution. The fundamental task of resuming negotiations has been further complicated by the fact that the frequent calls of the international community on the parties to reject unilateral action that prejudges a final settlement remain unheeded. Israel continues to build settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This illegal practice must come to an end immediately.

The absence of any progress in diplomatic efforts creates a vacuum that heightened confrontation and a further build-up of mistrust threaten to fill. A sad confirmation of this was the escalation of violence around the Gaza Strip between 7 and 9 April, in which dozens of people died or were injured, at a level not seen since 2009. We strongly urge all sides to show restraint and to implement the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009). We support the complete lifting of the Gaza blockade. We recognize the importance of protecting the unhindered access of humanitarian assistance to and throughout the entire territory of

Gaza. However, we deem it important to avoid actions that could be perceived as provocations.

An additional factor exacerbating the situation in Gaza is the increased activity of radical groups. Like everyone here, we were shaken by the killing by extremists of the Italian human rights activist Vittorio Arrigoni. We urge Hamas, the controlling authority in Gaza, to do everything necessary to ensure security in the Strip. Abductions and assaults on individuals cannot be allowed to become daily political practice. We believe that, in the context of the creation of an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian State with territorial integrity, overcoming the divisions within Palestinian ranks is of paramount importance. Russia has consistently called for such unity, which would lay the necessary foundation for substantive Palestinian-Israeli talks and future agreements.

Considering that September is only months away, it is incumbent on us to rekindle diplomatic efforts to find a way out of this explosive dead end. I would like to draw attention once more to the existence in the Security Council's arsenal of a powerful tool: sending missions to the region. In the current circumstances, the Russian proposal to send a Security Council mission to the Middle East is especially timely, since its goal is to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. I would also emphasize separately that the mission's task is not to blame anyone but to listen to the legitimate concerns of each side and attempt to find some common ground. We are grateful for the support voiced today for this initiative.

It is the Russian Federation's consistent belief that a complete, fair and lasting settlement in the Middle East is possible only with the inclusion of all settlement tracks: Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese.

Turning to events in Syria, we support the maintenance of law and order and the achievement of stability, internal consensus and social peace in that country in order to prevent unfavourable developments and casualties. That, as we see it, is the aim of the efforts of President Al-Assad to institute domestic reforms, including the lifting of the state of emergency. In that respect, we deem unacceptable any external interference in Syrian affairs or those of other States in the region.

We are hoping for a speedy conclusion to the process of forming a Government in Lebanon on the basis of a consensus that will incorporate the views of all Lebanese. It is important that this process take place within constitutional parameters. We expect the country's new Government to remain firmly committed to Lebanon's international obligations, and we urge both the Lebanese and Israeli sides to continue to work to implement the positions articulated in resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri (India): I would like to join other colleagues in thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements, of which we have taken careful note.

The debate today has really been an extension of the Council's continuing attention to Palestine and related issues, and my remarks will basically focus on that.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be grim, with no sign of movement in peace talks. The expectation that the Quartet would meet on 15 April and come up with a statement that would enable Palestinians and Israelis to resume talks has again not materialized. The lack of progress in even holding talks is also contributing to an increase in violence.

And yet it is imperative that the hopes raised for a Palestinian State during the past two years not be lost. The State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority have received commendations from various quarters, including financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The April 2011 report of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process is the latest to endorse the achievements of the Palestinian Authority.

The report makes it amply clear that the progress made in the areas of the rule of law and human rights, livelihoods and productive sectors, education and culture, health, social protection, infrastructure and water are now sufficient for a functioning Government of a State. The Palestinian Authority has therefore shown its determination to persist with Prime Minister Fayyad's plan for achieving statehood. As we approach September 2011, these developments on the governance front should inject a sense of urgency into international efforts to resume peace talks.

The main hindrance to a resumption of peace talks is lack of mutual trust. Statements on the

existence of Israel emanating from time to time from various sections of Palestinian society serve only to aggravate that lack of mutual trust. The perception that such statements, and the continuing rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip on Israel, increase Israel's vulnerability must be seen in this context. The recent spate of violence, including retaliation on Gaza after an attack on a school bus in southern Israel, clearly shows the divisions that exist. Such events deserve our strongest condemnation; we also condemn the killing of an abducted Italian national in Gaza last week.

While we commend the achievements in the territories administered by the Palestinian Authority, it is equally important to note the reason for the deplorable situation in Gaza, where even essentials are difficult to come by. The blockade of Gaza is adversely affecting its population, which barely has access to essential commodities. Gaza's access to such commodities is imperative, since the situation is also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence. Given the situation, humanitarian assistance to Gaza and its delivery should not be allowed to exacerbate the precarious security situation. It would be prudent to use established channels for delivering humanitarian assistance. At the same time, those channels must improve the efficacy of their delivery systems and look for stronger and more effective mechanisms for delivering humanitarian assistance.

We concur with the sense of the international community that freezing settlement activity in the Palestinian territories could enable the peace talks to resume. Lack of unity among Palestinian factions is another major issue. We note the recent initiatives aimed at promoting intra-Palestinian unity and hope they will result in a meaningful rapprochement among various Palestinian groups.

Equally important are other issues enmeshed in the conflict relating to Arab lands that remain under Israeli occupation. Progress in the Lebanese and Syrian tracks is core to achieving a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. In a region witnessing protest movements all around, a continuing impasse in the peace talks could have a destabilizing effect on a much larger area. If the peace talks do not recommence quickly, India fears that unilateral steps taken by the parties would only increase the distance between them and further complicate the situation. We therefore call on the Quartet members to intensify their collective and individual efforts to break the stalemate.

India has a long-standing tradition of solidarity with the Palestinian people. India has supported the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet Road Map and relevant Security Council resolutions.

India has been contributing to the capacity- and institution-building of the Palestinian people with its material and technical assistance programmes. India has also extended assistance through the India, Brazil and South Africa forum. India is also contributing $1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, continuing our solidarity with the Palestinian people in their pursuit of legitimate goals and their quest for development based on dignity and self-reliance.

In conclusion, let me quote from a letter our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru, wrote on 11 July 1947 to Albert Einstein.

> "I do not myself see how this problem can be resolved by violence and conflict on one side or the other. Even if such violence and conflict achieve certain ends for the moment, they must necessarily be temporary. I do earnestly hope that some kind of agreement might be arrived at between the Arabs and the Jews. I do not think even an outside power can impose its will for long or enforce some new arrangements against the will of the parties concerned."

These words were relevant more than 60 years ago. They are even more relevant now. Agreement must be reached between the parties through direct negotiations for it to endure. To that end, we hope that the parties will restart talks without further delay. Our expectation is that the talks would lead to a final and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict, in which several generations in the region have been mired. We all owe it to future generations that they do not remain mired in this conflict. We therefore reiterate our call to both sides to show a spirit of flexibility, compromise and political will to reach that end.

Mr. Onanga Ndiaye (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to begin by conveying its gratitude to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his very informative briefing. We also extend our gratitude to the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their contributions.

Today's debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, takes place at a critical moment when popular movements shaking the region are leading to unpredictable results. The stream of events referred to by some as an Arab spring will require profound political, social, cultural and economic change throughout the region. Given these developments, new approaches must be considered taking into account this new momentum of transformation in this important part of the world, which has been affected for numerous decades by countless crises and conflicts. The fate of the peace process will be inextricably linked to the results of the protest demonstrations taking place throughout the region.

The September 2010 suspension of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians due to a lack of agreement on stalemated issues has damaged the peace process. The continued settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, recent escalations of violence by both sides and the announced launching of new humanitarian flotillas to Gaza next month are, my delegation believes, detrimental to the international community's diplomatic efforts aimed at returning both parties to the negotiation table. Gabon remains concerned by the political stalemate. It is important that negotiations between the parties resume as quickly as possible under legitimate conditions conducive to enabling the international community's assistance in resolving the differences.

With respect to the vital issue of providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza, my country reiterates its call for the lifting of the blockade against Gaza in order to facilitate access for the civilian population to emergency assistance and economic development, which are so necessary to their survival and well-being.

My country considers it absolutely necessary that resolution 1860 (2009) be fully implemented in all its aspects to guarantee the right to access and freedom of movement in Gaza. Gabon calls upon all countries providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza to utilize existing channels in order to avoid any misunderstanding and thus to contribute to Israel's security and that of the population of Gaza.

Direct negotiations must resume based upon clear parameters that are equally mindful of Israel's security needs. In that regard, Gabon supports all recent diplomatic initiatives aimed at relaunching this process, and renews its call for the creation of a viable Palestinian State living peacefully side by side with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

My delegation also welcomes the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and expresses its full support for the United Nations following actions undertaken with the Palestinian authorities pursuant to the positive developments in the six areas necessary for the creation of a Palestinian State and, of course, for strengthening its State institutions.

On the political situation in Lebanon, Gabon is dismayed to note the impasse in negotiations to form a new Government. We encourage the new Prime Minister to leave no stone unturned in order to achieve consensus on this very important issue. Failure could risk serving as a pretext for the emergence of a new crisis that will carry the seeds of renewed violence, source of both instability and conflict. Similarly, my delegation believes that the effective implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) by both parties continues to be the sine qua non condition to guarantee a settlement of all the outstanding issues.

Given the positive progress seen at the diplomatic and economic levels of the process to build the Palestinian State, Gabon reiterates its support for the Quartet's efforts and urges it to convene a meeting as quickly as possible, during which this progress could be appropriately considered. Such a meeting would positively encourage both parties to return to the negotiation table and achieve a political solution before September.

In conclusion, my country believes that the overall situation in the Middle East is a source of renewed hope in the region. It is the responsibility of the international community to take into account the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region, who want to seize this historic opportunity to take control of their own destinies.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Colombia.

My delegation thanks Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. This is the moment to reiterate that the search for a peaceful and fair settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian situation requires a resolution on all core issues of the dispute, including security, strengthening Palestinian institutions, the definition of borders and settlements in the occupied territories. We therefore welcome what has been expressed by the Quartet — that, if the Palestinian Authority continues its institution-building process, it will be in a position to establish a State in the near future.

On the other hand, we regret that powerful existing tensions continue to cause civilian casualties, affecting the general population. We call on the parties to exercise restraint and do their utmost to bring to justice those responsible for those acts of destabilization.

My delegation urges all parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take all necessary measures to protect civilians, especially children, from direct and indirect violence.

My delegation calls for the resumption of talks between the parties on the basis of mutual respect, recognition of the identity and rights of each people and the fulfilment of obligations under existing agreements recognized by both parties.

Colombia advocates a comprehensive solution to the unstable situation in the region and the cessation of the threat or use of force and of terrorism. Given the upheaval in the region, my country approaches this issue comprehensively and with a commitment to the lofty goals of international peace and security, as we have demonstrated on the many occasions when we have fulfilled our responsibilities within various United Nations bodies. We therefore support the Organization's efforts aimed at achieving real progress towards Palestinian unity and peace in the region. We must also take advantage of this renewed momentum and the winds of change blowing in the region, so as to provide an effective solution to this long-standing situation.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The stalemate in direct negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides undermines heartfelt and honest international efforts to achieve progress in the peace process. Peace and settlement policy do not go together. Settlement activity must be stopped in order to enable us to resume direct negotiations leading to the creation of two States, a Palestinian State and an Israeli State, based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State — two States living side by side in accordance with international resolutions and international terms of reference, especially resolutions adopted by the Security Council, as well as the important Arab Peace Initiative.

The Palestinian Authority is deploying every possible means to fulfil its commitments under the Oslo Accord and the Road Map. However, we see no genuine palpable will or commitment on Israel's part to achieve a political settlement. That stands to undermine what has been achieved to date by the Palestinian Authority in its ambitious plans to build the institutions of a future State. Israel's intransigence in its wish to prevent Palestine from becoming a full Member of the United Nations in the coming session was referred to by President Obama in his address to the General Assembly (see A/65/PV.11). No one can accept the Palestinian people remaining without a State. Peace and security for both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, is necessary, but Israel's obstinate policy hampers peace and leads to further escalation of the situation in the region.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on the Quartet and the Security Council to act quickly to persuade Israel to immediately put an end to its settlement policy, to resume direct negotiations and to find a comprehensive, peaceful, just and lasting solution, because the question of Palestine is an international question, not a regional one, and resolving it will benefit all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.